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Sec. 4.01.4 Off Season

Abel, Rudolf

C.I.A. Lt. 02 U-2

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Soviet Is Lifting Cloaks From Some of Its Spies

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, Jan. 18 — Far from letting its secret agents who are unmasked abroad slip back into obscurity, the Soviet Union is now glorifying them publicly.

The latest such tribute is a two-and-a-half-hour movie entitled "Off-Season," introduced by Col. Rudolf I. Abel, a Soviet agent who operated in the United States from 1948 until his arrest in 1957. He was exchanged Feb. 10, 1962, for Francis Gary Powers, the pilot of a U-2 reconnaissance plane downed over the Soviet Union May 1, 1960.

"Off-Season" tells of efforts by Soviet agents to obtain information about a chemical-warfare center somewhere in Western Europe where a former Nazi physician in a concentration camp is supposedly working on a nerve gas capable of transforming people into automatons.

The film is interspersed with documentary films from Nazi camps showing prisoners allegedly under the effect of such a psychochemical gas.

Abel Addresses Audience

In the opening sequence, Colonel Abel tells the audience: "During the war I had occasion to meet a German physician, an avowed Nazi, who cynically declared that all inferior people should be mercilessly annihilated for the sake of improving the human race."

"These wild ideas did not die with Hitler's Germany. In the United States, I met an American officer from the Army's chemical laboratory at Fort Detrick [in Maryland] who expressed similar thoughts."

Together with recent revelations in the Soviet Union of the work of its secret agents abroad, the movie marks a new trend in a country that only a few years ago firmly denied that it engaged in espionage.

In Neighborhood Theaters

The turning point came in the early sixties with the disclosure in the Soviet Union of the work of Richard Sorge, a Soviet agent who penetrated the German Embassy in Tokyo before World War II and sent Stalin warnings of the impending

Films Being Used to Give Glory to Agents Unmasked During Work in West

ing German attack. Mr. Sorge was later unmasked and executed in 1944 by the Japanese.

"Off-Season" was released this week for showing in Moscow's neighborhood movie houses after having played in a few packed downtown theaters. The action takes place in the unidentified Western country and in the Moscow headquarters of the Committee of State Security, the Soviet secret police agency responsible for internal security and for espionage.

According to Colonel Abel, the movie is based on real events with the names and locale changed. To confuse the issue, both West German and British street scenes and neighborhoods are shown.

In contrast to former garish portrayals of the West, this film is quite authentic in showing auto traffic, small homes and other evidences of a higher standard of living than the Soviet Union's. There appears to have been a steady trend in recent Soviet moviemaking toward a more candid treatment of subjects that were once taboo or grossly distorted.

There are indications that "Off-Season," so named because its action takes place in winter in a small seaside resort, is based in part on the work of Gordon A. Lonsdale, a Soviet agent who was arrested in Britain in 1961 on charges of having spied on the underwa-

ter-warfare research station at Portland, on England's south coast.

The film's hero uses the name of Lonsfield and, like Mr. Lonsdale, operated a jukebox business as a cover.

Mr. Lonsdale was exchanged in April, 1964, for Greville M. Wynne, a Briton who was held in the Soviet Union on espionage charges. The Soviet agent in "Off-Season" is also captured and is exchanged after a few years in jail. The stark scene of exchange on a lonely highway is typical of the matter-of-fact mood of the entire picture.

Sec. 4.01.4 Dead

Season